

RADICAL SHEKH GRAPHICS



POLEAXED

15¢



G.T. H. SHWORTH/97.

MATURE READERS & MAINLY CONCERNED WITH AN ALCOHOLIC INCIDENT OF JACKSON POLLACK.

POLACKED

AM GOING TO KILL MYSELF?

* TOMY SMITH RECOGNIZED JACKSON POLACK'S WHISKEY VOICE ~

HOLD ON -

I'LL BE OUT ~

~ HE PUT DOWN THE PHONE AND DROVE INTO THE NIGHT. IT WOULD BE HOURS BEFORE HE REACHED POLACK'S HOUSE IN EASTERN LONG ISLAND ~

* HOURS IN WHICH, KNOWING JACKSON, ANYTHING COULD HAPPEN. IN 1952, IT WAS TWO AND A HALF YEARS SINCE 'LIFE' MAGAZINE HAD FLUNG HIM INTO THE SPOTLIGHT OF AMERICA'S CELEBRITY MAD POSTWAR MEDIA. MAKING HIM, VIRTUALLY OVER-NIGHT, AMERICAN ARTS FIRST STAR.

* HE HAD ALWAYS BEEN AN 'ALCOHOLIC IN EXCESSUS' BUT DRINKING ALONE COULDN'T EXPLAIN WHAT WAS HAPPENING TO POLACK. ~ THERE WAS SOMETHING BEHIND THE DRINKING THAT WAS PUSHING AT JACKSON FROM WITHIN, TORMENTING, EVEN TRYING TO KILL HIM.

JACKSON POLACK HAD DEMONS INSIDE. EVERYONE COULD SEE THAT. BUT NO ONE KNEW WHERE THEY CAME FROM OR WHAT THEY WANTED.

IN THE HOUSE POLACK'S WIFE, LEE KRASNER, WAS COVERING BEHIND THEIR BED WHEN SMITH ARRIVED.

SHE HAD SPENT THE LAST SEVEN HOURS SITTING IN THE DARKNESS TERRIFIED BY FEAR AS HER HUSBAND STORMED THROUGH THE HOUSE - ROARING CURSES AT THE WORLD. SHE KNEW WHAT TO DO WHEN JACKSON DRANK AND THE RAGE CAME OUT - TRIED TO BECOME INVISIBLE ~

THIS TIME THE STORM SHOWED NO SIGN OF ABATING ~



~ WHATEVER ANXIETIES WEIGHED ON SMITH, HE COULDN'T HAVE BEEN PREPARED FOR THE SCENE INSIDE JACKSON'S STUDIO WHEN HE ARRIVED. IT REEKED OF LIQUOR ~



SMITH HAD OFTEN GONE DRINK-
ING WITH POLLACK AND HAD AL-
MOST AS OFTEN SEEN HIM
DRUNK.

PLAYFUL DRUNK, DANGEROUS DRUNK,
DEPRESSED DRUNK. BUT EVEN
- HE, UNLIKE LEE, HAD EVER
SEEN THIS RAGE.



WHAT THE HELL
YOU DOING HERE?

SMITH TRIED TO CALM HIS FRIEND. HE KNEW BETTER THAN TO REFER DIRECTLY TO JACKSON'S DRINKING. NOTHING WAS MORE LIKELY TO SET HIM OFF AGAIN THAN TO TAKE THE BOTTLE AWAY OR SUGGEST HE HAD HAD ENOUGH. DESPERATELY, TONY FILLED THE AIR WITH ART TALK. GRADUALLY, THE RAGE SUBSIDED.

THE STUDIO WAS COLD AND DARK, A PALPABLE REFLECTION OF JACKSON'S CREATIVE STATE. THE YELLOW LIGHT OF CANDLES SPREAD ACROSS THE ROWS OF PAINTINGS LINING THE WALLS. SMALL BLACK AND WHITE ONES IN FRONT, CLASSIC ONES LIKE 'AUTUMN RHYTHM AND NUMBER 32' IN BACK THEIR MONUMENTAL CALIGRAPHY STARK IN THE DIM LIGHT.

"couldn't be about problems with Betty Parsons"

"Huh."

JACKSON HELD A CANDELABRUM ALOFT AND WALKED TO A KEROSENE STOVE IN THE CORNER. THE GRIM POETRY OF JACKSON MOVING UNSTEADILY THROUGH THE DARK, SURROUNDED BY HUGE APPARITIONS OF HIS PAINTINGS COULD NOT HAVE ESCAPED THE POET IN TONY SMITH.

WHEN JACKSON LIT THE STOVE AND FLAMES SHOT UP THE VISION TURNED DEMONIC-

FOR CHRIST'S SAKE, JACKSON - PUT IT OUT!

ON THE FLOOR LAY A PAINTING JACKSON HAD BEEN WORKING ON RECENTLY - A NETWORK OF DELICATE CIRCLES PAINTED WITH A LIGHT, TENTATIVE BRUSH - UNLIKE ANYTHING HE HAD DONE BEFORE. SEEING IT, SMITH THOUGHT OF SOMETHING GEORGE GROSZ HAD TOLD HIM ONCE: "WHEN A PAINTER WORKS IN CIRCLES - HE IS NEAR MADNESS." LOOK AT VAN GOGH, HE HAD SAID.



TO GET POLLOCK 'OUT OF HIMSELF', SMITH SUGGESTED THEY DO A PAINTING TOGETHER. BETWEEN SWIGS OF BOURBON, THE TWO MEN UNWRAPPED A FRESH ROLL OF BELGIAN LINEN AND UNFURLED IT ACROSS THE STUDIO'S CEMENT FLOOR.

JACKSON SEARCH THROUGH A BOX OF PAINT FOR THE RIGHT COLOUR TO BEGIN. THE FIRST TUBE HE PULLED OUT A TUBE OF CADMIUM RED; SO WAS THE SECOND. AND THE THIRD. AFTER FOUR OR FIVE MORE TRIES, HE CRIED IN EXASPERATION

-Ah well - let's start with - CADMIUM ORANGE -
-hey - AFTER ALL I COME FROM ORANGE, NEW JERSEY - ha.

I CAN'T START WITH CADMIUM RED!!!



SMITH SQUEEZED A LONG LINE OF ORANGE AT THE EDGE OF THE CANVAS, THEN LAID A PIECE OF WAX PAPER OVER THE LINE AND WALKED ON IT. WHERE HE STEPPED THE PAINT OZOED OUT, FORMING A TRAIL OF UNEVEN BLOTCHES.

SMITH
SO THAT'S THE WAY YOU DO IT -
HERE'S HOW I DO IT -

IN A SUDDEN SWEEPING MOTION, HE GRABBED A BIG BUCKET OF BLACK PUCCO AND POURED IT ON THE CANVAS. FOR JUST AN INSTANT HE COULD HAVE BEEN THE JACKSON POLLOCK WHO'S IMAGE WOULD BE INDELIBLY ETCHED IN THE PUBLIC CONSCIOUSNESS - A BROODING FIGURE FLINGING LARIATS OF PAINT, HIS ARM DESCRIBING CIRCLES IN THE AIR.



FORGET THE HAND "BARNETT NEWMAN SAID OF POLACK AT WORK" ITS THE MIND - NOT BRAIN, BUT MIND - SOUL, CONCENTRATION, GUT. I'VE SEEN HIM COME OUT HIS STUDIO LIKE A WET RAG": FOR JUST A MOMENT, THROUGH THE ALCOHOLIC HAZE, SMITH MUST HAVE GAZED THE APPARITION OF THAT JACKSON POLACK MOVING AMONG HIS CANDLELT CREATIONS.



AS IT MIXED WITH TONY'S SPLOTCHES OF ORANGE POLLOCK'S BLACK DUCCO TURNED A BILIOUS GREEN. TO KEEP JACKSON'S MIND OFF HIS PROBLEMS HE PRESSED AHEAD, GRABBING A BRUSH AND ANOTHER COLOUR AND LAYING IT ON.

"It looks like vomit"



JACKSON JOINED IN AND THEY 'SPLASHED AND DROOLED' PAINT UNTIL THE LUMINOUS EXPANSE OF BELGIAN LINEN WAS COVERED WITH A HALF INCH OF THE BILIOUS GREEN.

AS HE OFTEN DID, JACKSON APPLIED THE PAINT WITH BASTING SYRINGES MADE OF THIN GLASS. WHEN A SYRINGE CLOGGED, HE WOULD FLING IT AT THE CANVAS IN DISGUST AND FILL ANOTHER WITH PAINT. WHEN THAT CLOGGED, ANOTHER - THROWING THEM SO THAT SHATTERED AGAINST THE CONCRETE FLOOR. HE WENT THROUGH A DOZEN, UNTIL THE PAINT SURFACE AROUND HIM GLISTENED WITH SHIVERS OF GLASS.

DEFIANTLY, HE TOOK OFF HIS SHOES AND WADED THROUGH THE DARK, SPARKLING SCUM IN HIS BARE FEET, DARING SMITH TO FOLLOW. NUMBED BY THE COLD AND THE BOURBON, SMITH WADED IN BEHIND HIM.



BY MORNING, TONY SMITH HAD RETURNED TO THE HOUSE TO CLEAN OFF AND SOBER UP. LEE WAS WAITING TO HELP.

WE SPENT A LONG TIME GETTING GLASS OUT OF MY FEET.



TOGETHER THEY CARRIED JACKSON, WHO HAD PASSED OUT IN THE STUDIO, BACK TO THE HOUSE. IN THE KITCHEN, WHILE JACKSON SLEPT FITFULLY, LEE BATHED HIS FEET.



THE PAINTING THAT THE TWO MEN HAD BEGUN LAY ON THE STUDIO FLOOR, STIFF WITH WET PAINT AND BROKEN GLASS.

OVER THE NEXT SIX MONTHS JACKSON WOULD RETURN TO IT AGAIN AND AGAIN.

SCRAPING AWAY THE BILLIOUS GREEN, APPLYING NEW LAYERS OF YELLOW, RED, LIGHT BLUE, ALUMINIUM - AND FINALLY - USING A LONG PIECE OF TWO BY FOUR - 8 DEEP BLUE 'POLES'.



TWENTY YEARS LATER, THE SAME PAINTING - 'BLUE POLES' WAS SOLD TO THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT FOR 2 MILLION DOLLARS.



EVEN PICASSO HAD NEVER DONE BETTER THAN A MILLION - THE WORLD HAD FOR GIVEN POLLOCK -



EVEN IF IT DIDN'T YET KNOW WHAT FOR. JACKSON POLLOCK

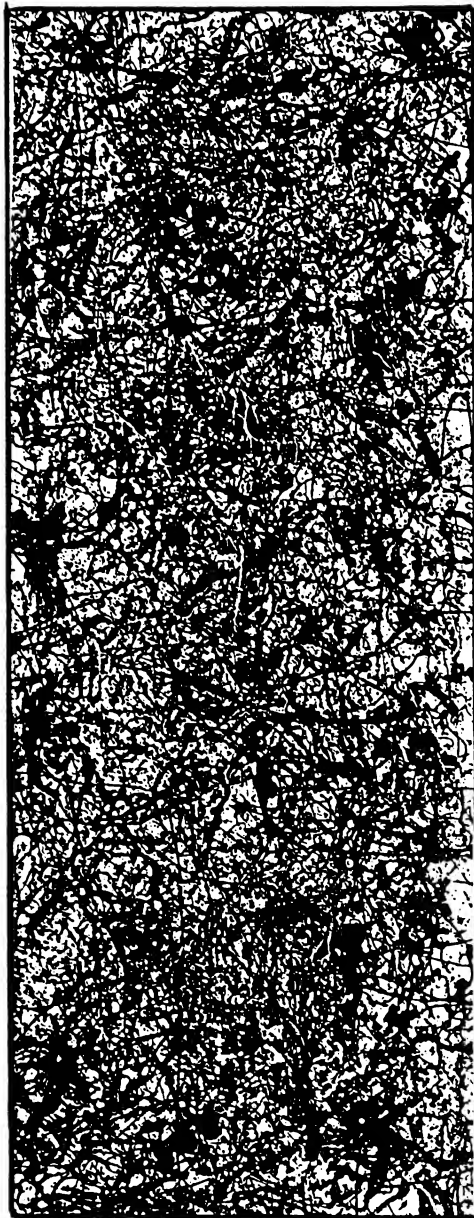
to be the greatest living painter in the United States?

NO AMERICAN PAINTING HAD EVER SOLD FOR MORE.

ULTIMATELY, PAINTING WAS THE ONLY WAY JACKSON POLLOCK COULD APPEASE THE DEMONS THAT TORMENTED HIM. IN THE END, PAINTING WAS A WAY TO TEST THE WORLD, PROBE ITS HEART - AND MAKE IT SUFFER FOR GIVE-NESS.

ADAPTED FROM 'JACKSON POLLOCK: AN AMERICAN SAGA' STEVEN NAIFEH/GREGORY WHITE SMITH - GAZ/1.

THE ARTIST DOESN'T
SEE THINGS AS THEY
ARE - BUT AS HE IS.
-ANON.



·LUCIFER·

Ahhh, BANANA OIL!
MILT GROSS.

NOTE: THIS STORY WAS ORIGINALLY PRINTED IN ELECTRIC FERRET #11, 1991 - AND IS REPRINTED FOR SOME PECULIAR ASHWORTH REASONING. MATERIAL IS © COPYRIGHT 91/94 GERARD ASHWORTH / RADICAL SHEIKH GRAPHICS (PUBLISHER OF SAID 'E.F.' AND 'THE WEIRD STRESS KITTENS.') POSTAL ADDRESS 7-70 QUEENSLIFF RD, QUEENSLIFF, 2096, N.S.W. - AND NO -1 T'WERENT INEBRIATED DOING THIS, WOJY PARKER-